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The Parables of Jesus

ELBERT RUSSELL



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The Parables of Jesus

A COURSE OF TEN LESSONS
ARRANGED FOR DAILY STUDY

BY

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National Board
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the book is to introduce students to the teachings of Jesus as given in His recorded parables. It is not intended to take the place of the study of the parables themselves, but only to aid in the study and to suggest some practical results of the teaching. The course is arranged to cover ten weeks but may be shortened by omitting the last two lessons.

The work is based on the text of the American Revised Version. At some points the King James' Version has readings that differ from it and the student should, at least, be able to refer to the American text.

The following references will be found helpful to the student who desires works giving fuller treatment. I give them in order of their helpfulness. Goebel's book is the best interpretation, but is based on the Greek text to such an extent that one who knows no Greek cannot get the full benefit of it.

The Parables of Jesus.—Goebel.

The Parables of Jesus.—Dods.

Notes on the Parables.—Trench.

The Parables of Jesus.—Various Authors.

The Parabolic Teaching of Christ.—Bruce.

The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.—Edersheim.

In general, the works on the life of Christ and commentaries on the Gospels.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the

works just mentioned by title. It has not been possible to give particular credit for the help received at each point in the book.

Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana,

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LESSON I

TEACHING BY PARABLES

First Day. *The New Method.* Mark 4:10-13, 33, 34; Matt. 13:10-17; Luke 8:9, 10.

1. The occasion of Jesus' first teaching exclusively in parables was a day about the middle of His Galilean ministry. He had used parables before by way of illustration (cf. Mark 2:19-22; Luke 7:40-43); but on this day as Jesus taught by the seaside He presented the truths concerning the Kingdom of God altogether in parables. The disciples noted the change in method, and asked the reason. Jesus' answer (Matt. 13:11-15) refers to the fact expressed by Isaiah (6:9, 10) that one cannot present truth to men without leaving them duller of perception, if they reject it (cf. John 12:40; Acts 28:26, 27). At this time Jesus' teaching was developing hostility on one hand and on the other hand an overzealous following, which was likely to try to force Him into a Messianic revolution, just as the multitude did later at the feeding of the five thousand (see John 6:15).

Therefore Jesus veiled His teaching in parables. This would hide His meaning from the shallow-minded and retard its effect on the receptive, but the story would lodge firmly in their minds and excite curiosity, so as to lead them on to fuller understanding of His teaching. To His disciples and to

all eager to know more of the truth He explained the meaning more fully (Mark 4:11-13).

2. Jesus' skill as a teacher shows itself nowhere clearer than in the way He adapted His methods to the needs of His hearers and to the circumstances of His work. When these changed He changed His methods. When direct teaching, such as is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), was no longer suited to accomplish His purpose, He resorted to parables.

3. Study other cases where Jesus changed His methods to suit changed conditions. Cf. Mark 1:39 with 1:45; Mark 1:43, 44 with Mark 5:19, 20. See also Mark 8:31; John 4:1-4.

How well does Paul's definition of tact in Christian work (1 Cor. 9:20-22) fit Jesus' practice?

Second Day. *The Parable as a Means of Conveying Truth.*

1. A parable is a brief narrative drawn from human life and told to convey some moral or religious truth. "The little girl was very near the mark when she said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" (Taylor, *Parables of Our Saviour*). The parable differs from the fable in that it is drawn from human life only and is true to it (cf. Judges 9:7-21). It differs from the allegory in that it teaches a single point while every detail of the allegory is to be interpreted. In the Gospel of John we find allegories and sustained metaphors instead of parables. Such are the Good

Shepherd (John 10:11-18) and the Vine and the Branches (John 15). The parable differs from a story that is merely an illustration in that it is not a part of a larger discourse (cf. Luke 6:47-49).

2. The parable is very effective as a means of teaching, especially of oral teaching such as Jesus did exclusively.

(1) It is easily remembered, and even when not at first understood, it is like a seed dropped in the soil, which may bear fruit in the future.

(2) It presents the truth in a concrete form, which makes it more easily grasped than if it were abstractly presented.

(3) It excites curiosity and stimulates effort to get the truth embedded in it. Truth sought and labored for is more fully valued than that which costs nothing (cf. Prov. 2:1-5).

The problem before every teacher is to get others to see the truth. For this it is not sufficient merely to state it as it appears to the mind of the teacher. As Robert Louis Stevenson says: "It takes two to tell the truth; one to tell it and one to hear it."

The truth which the teacher sees may seem like a falsehood to the hearer, if not rightly presented. Robert Browning says that it is the mission of art to make truth *look true* (*The Ring and the Book*). It was for this purpose that Jesus used the parable.

Third Day. *Principles of Interpretation.*

1. The story. The first thing in the study of a parable is to learn and understand the story. Some

of the parables deal with matters almost as universal as human life and in consequence require no explanation. But most of the stories involve customs, conditions and ideas peculiar to the Jews of Palestine in Jesus' time and therefore require explanation before an American reader fully understands them. For example, it helps one understand the parable of the Prodigal Son to know that the *husks* which he desired to eat (Luke 15:15, 16) were the pods of the carob tree. One can hardly appreciate the parable of the Unforgiving Servant unless he know how much the ten thousand talents and the hundred shillings were worth (Matt. 18:24, 28). A knowledge of Jewish social customs is essential to an understanding of the parables of the Great Supper and Ten Virgins.

2. The context. Often the best clues to the lesson of a parable are furnished by the context, which usually gives the occasion that called forth the parable and sometimes also the purpose and even the plain lesson of it. Thus Matt. 18:21, 22 gives the occasion of the parable following and Matt. 19:27-30 and 20:16 give the occasion and lesson of the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. See also Matt. 21:43 in relation to the preceding parable and Luke 18:1 in connection with one that follows it.

Fourth Day. *Principles of Interpretation* (Continued).

3. The central point. Jesus' parables are always told in such a way as to make everything center

about one point. A parable must not be forced to teach more than one lesson, however many other good lessons that lie beyond its purpose it may suggest. To try to get other lessons is to try to make an allegory of the story. The one lesson of a parable is to be sought at its central point.

The central point should be determined with reference to the story as such and its context and should then be used as a guide in the interpretation. It is almost certain to lead to confusion, if one take the opposite course, first thinking of a lesson which the parable seems likely to teach and then trying to fit the story to it.

"In searching for the central point attention must be paid to the parts of the story that are made *emphatic in the telling* and to those that are *essential to the outcome* of it as told. To do this one should pay special attention to the parts that are given in detail and the parts that are passed over with as few words as possible. The emphasis may be indicated by repetition of words, phrases, or by repeated allusion to incidents or phases of the story. Attention should also be given to the place at which the story is taken up and where it ends. The central point must be such as to include or account for the whole story. A little practice in retelling the parables, changing the emphasis and leaving out or putting in parts, will soon show which parts are necessary to the point of the story as Jesus tells it and where His emphasis lies. In the parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7) notice how the idea of the search is emphasized negatively by the leaving of

the ninety and nine, and positively by the phrase "go after that which is lost *until he find it.*" Notice how the ideas of the loss, finding, and joy are emphasized by the repetition of words. In the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4: 26-29) notice how the beginning and end of the parable confine the man's activity to the sowing and harvest. The way is still further cleared for the central point by calling attention to the man's inactivity while the seed is growing and his ignorance of the process by which it grows. Then the central point is stated positively: "The earth beareth fruit of herself," and this power of the earth to make the seed grow is still further emphasized by the assertion that it makes it grow through all the stages,—“first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.” Negatively and positively the story is made to center about the assertion of the fruit-bearing capacity of the earth.

Likewise in the parable of the Unrighteous Judge (Luke 18: 1-8) the central point is the persistence of the widow. In the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13: 1-9) the central point is that the differences in results were due to differences in the soil. In the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20: 1-16) the central point is that all who came as soon as they had opportunity received the same pay as those who were hired first.

Fifth Day. *Principles of Interpretation* (Continued).

4. Classes of parables. There are two distinct

classes of parables, which require different treatment in order to interpret them aright.

(1) A symbolic parable is one in which each important element of the story *symbolizes* something in the spiritual realm. In such a parable the story is not directly about the real subject of the teaching. The parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13: 31, 32) is symbolic because its lesson is not about gardening or botany but about the growth of the kingdom of God. The story of the Drag-net (Matt. 13: 47-50) was not told to give instruction about fishing, nor the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18: 21-35) to teach a lesson in political science.

Before getting the lesson of a symbolic parable, it is necessary to determine the spiritual equivalents of its elements. Thus in the parable of the Sower (Mark 4: 14-20) Jesus tells us that the sower is one who preaches the gospel, the seed is the word, the different soils are different classes of hearers, etc. Similarly it is evident from Matt. 21: 31, 32 that in the parable of the Two Sons the first son represents the scribes and Pharisees, and the second son, the publican and harlots.

(2) A typical parable is one which gives a *typical case* of the matter in question. The story is taken from the very relations about which the lesson is to be taught. Thus the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 27-37) is a typical case of true neighborliness. The parable of the Publican and Pharisee (Luke 18: 9-14) gives typical cases of prayer offered in the right spirit and in the wrong spirit. In the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12: 13-21)

both story and lesson have to do with the attitude towards wealth.

Jesus usually tells His typical parables in such a way that an attempt to treat them as symbolic results is gross absurdity. The context is frequently a guide in classifying parables, since it shows whether the story is taken from the realm in which some truth is to be illustrated.

To get the lesson of a typical parable it is only necessary to state the central truth. Since story and teaching are from the same field, the central point is the lesson. With the symbolic parables, on the other hand, it is necessary to get the statement of the central point of the story as such and then translate the symbolism into spiritual terms in order to get the lesson. For example, the central point of the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-9) is that the differences in results were due to differences in the soil. Now Jesus tells us that the seed represents the message and the different soils represent different classes of hearers. The lesson is, then, that the varying results of preaching the same gospel are due to the varying receptivity of the hearers.

Sixth Day. *Principles of Interpretation* (Continued).

5. The symbolism of the parables. This topic, of course, only applies to the symbolic parables. In dealing with the symbolism, it is necessary to observe two points: First, there is no fixed, unchang-

ing meaning to be given to an element wherever it appears in different parables. Some commentators assert that there is a fixed language of symbols used in the Bible and that each must have the same value wherever it occurs. For example we are told that leaven is always a symbol of evil in the Bible and that therefore it must mean evil in the parable of the Leaven, even though Jesus begins by saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is like it. The theory breaks down, however, when we observe that in one place the devil is said to be like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and that Christ in another is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Moreover, Jesus has explained the symbolism of two parables, the Sower, and the Tares (Matt. 13:18-23, 36-43). The same symbols occur in both, but with different meanings. In one the seed is the word and the sower the preacher. In the other the good seed represents good men and the one who sowed it the Son of Man. In the one, the soil consists of different classes of hearers; in the other the field is the world. This shows that we must interpret each parable by itself.

In the second place, not all details are significant. Sometimes they simply belong to the story as a true transcript of life. In the parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13:33) the "three measures" are the customary amount of meal and have no other significance. Jesus Himself does not give a meaning to the servants in the parable of the Tares. They could not well be distinguished from the "Sons of the kingdom" already symbolized by the good seed.

Seventh Day. Review.

It will be well to review the preceding principles and apply them to the interpretation of a parable. There should be no difficulty in finding the lesson of a parable if the work indicated in this lesson has been carefully done. The lesson of the parable will be that of the central point.

Take the simple and beautiful parable in Isaiah 5:1-7 for practice.

1. Tell the story and explain the nature and purpose of the details in the structure of the vineyard (verse 2) ; the difference between the "grapes" expected and the "wild grapes" borne ; and the play on words in verse 7.

2. The context. What light does verse 7 throw on the purpose of the parable? Might the evils denounced in verse 8 to 23 be the "wild grapes" of the parable?

3. The central point. State the central point of the story. Is it in verses 4 and 5?

4. Is the parable typical or symbolic? (See verse 7.)

5. Give the spiritual equivalents of (1) the owner, (2) the vineyard, (3) the wild grapes, (4) the destruction.

6. State the teaching of the parable, basing it on your statement of the central point and the spiritual equivalents of the symbols.

LESSON II

THE PARABLES OF THE KING'S GRACE

Luke 15

First Day. *The Occasion of the Parables.* Luke 15:1, 2.

Since the occasion of all the parables of this chapter is the same it ought to be considered in advance. Luke does not locate the occasion definitely in Jesus' ministry, but from what he says we know it must be the occasion described in Matt. 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17 or some similar one not recorded in the other gospels.

The Pharisees' idea of righteousness was that of separation from all that might defile, whether men or things. Their name means "separated." Hence they held aloof from Gentiles and sinners and despised the common people who did not scrupulously observe the law (cf. John 7:49). The Pharisees believed that all the separation from other peoples enjoined in the law and still further elaborated in their traditions (cf. Mark 7:1-5) was enjoined by God and represented His attitude toward sinners and Gentiles. Men who want to do right try to do what they think God does or would have them do.

Jesus' idea of righteousness is not a negative state to be preserved only by careful avoidance of all contact with evil, but an inward state of victory

over sin that has not only power to keep one's self pure, but power to heal and help others. A physician does not seek well people, but those who are ill. So a good man seeks sinners not to descend to their moral state, but to help them up to his. In this, these parables teach, he is like God.

Second Day. *The Lost Sheep.* Luke 15:3-7.

1. The story. To an Oriental shepherd his sheep are much more than so much wool and mutton. Except on rare festal occasions the Jewish shepherd did not eat of his flock. The days he spent alone with his sheep made them his close companions. He knew them by face and name and they knew his voice. He labored to care for them and might be called on to defend them from wild beasts and robbers at peril of his life. It was a face he knew and loved that the shepherd missed as the ninety-nine passed under the rod into the fold.

The following passages give a good idea of the shepherd's relation to his sheep: Gen. 31:38-40; 1 Sam. 17:34-37; Ezek. 34:11-16; John 10:7-16; Ps. 23.

See also *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, G. A. Smith, p. 311; *The Parables of Jesus*, by various authors, pp. 370, 371.

2. Context and central point. The occasion of the parable has already been discussed. Jesus Himself gives the lesson of it in 15:7. The central point is plainly, even without verse 7, the owner's love for the lost sheep which leads him to search

till he finds it and makes him rejoice over its recovery.

3. The parable is symbolic. The shepherd represents God. It is He who rejoices "in heaven." The lost sheep is the sinner. It is not necessary to find an equivalent for the "wilderness" and the "friends and neighbors."

4. The lesson is clear. God loves men because they belong to Him. He does not scorn and despise the man who is lost in sin, and, Pharisee-like, hold aloof till perchance the sinner may save himself and recover his purity; but God Himself seeks to save him and rejoices whenever He leads him to repent.

5. The Jews avoided the name of God as much as possible and often used "heaven" instead (cf. Matt. 5:34; Matt. 5:3 with Luke 6:20).

6. Is the lesson of Matt. 18:10-14 the same as that of this parable?

Third Day. *The Lost Coin.* Luke 15:8-10.

1. The story. Again Jesus chooses an object to which sentiment adds value. The ten coins were possibly worn across the woman's forehead or braided in her hair as ornaments; or they may have been the betrothal pledge of her lover. To lose one of them would be like an American girl's losing the diamond from her engagement ring.

The coin is a drachma, worth about sixteen cents. The house is a Jewish house of the poorer sort, without windows and having only a dirt floor. Part

of it may have been occupied and littered by the chickens, goat or donkey kept by the family. To find the coin on such a floor, it would be necessary to light a lamp and sweep diligently. The broom would be much like an old-fashioned splint-broom.

2. The occasion and central point are the same as in the preceding parable. The lesson (15:10) is again the love of the owner which leads her to seek for the lost and rejoice over its recovery.

3. The symbolism and lesson are given by Jesus. The woman represents God. It is He who rejoices "in the presence of the angels." Note that it does not read "among the angels" as it is often quoted. The lost coin represents the sinner.

4. State the lesson.

Fourth Day. *The Lost Son.* Luke 15:11-32.

1. The story. The name "prodigal" or "spend-thrift" calls attention to a minor detail of the parable. "Lost" son is better. The two preceding parables are in form questions addressed to the Pharisees. This is entirely in narrative form, without even the frequent introductory phrase, "The Kingdom of God is like" (cf. Matt. 13:24, 44, 45, 47).

According to the Jewish law of inheritance (Deut. 21:17) the part of the father's property falling to the younger son would be one third. At this time he divided "the living" or savings, not the land, between them.

Galilee was crossed by roads leading to the "far

country" in every direction. George Adam Smith suggests (*Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 431) that it was to a city of Phœnicia that the prodigal son went to see the world when he left the farm in some fertile valley of Galilee. Here he would find the sensual luxury, the harlots and the swine.

The "husks" which he was driven to eat were the pods of the carob tree. They resemble the pods of the honey locust tree and like them have a sweet substance where the seeds are attached (see a Bible dictionary under "husks").

The "fatted calf" was one kept shut up and well fed that it might be ready for a feast (1 Sam. 28: 24; Amos 6: 4).

2. Context and central point. The occasion of the parable is the same as that of the two preceding. Here Jesus gives no explanation of the teaching of the parable as in the case of the others, but verse 32 plainly gives the central point of the story in the father's words to the elder brother. It is the joy of the father over the return of the son he had loved and lost. Notice how the story in each of its two parts reaches its climax in this joy, both when the prodigal arrives (15: 20-24) and when the elder brother refuses to come in (15: 32).

3. Like the other two it is a symbolic parable. The father represents God; the younger brother, a sinner; the elder brother, the Pharisees or others legally righteous. The other details need not be interpreted. The lesson is exactly expressed by 15: 7.

Fifth Day. *The Lost Son* (Continued).

1. The elder brother (Luke 15:25-32) introduces a new feature in these parables. He gives the Pharisaic point of view. He has never transgressed a commandment, nor has he, on the other hand, ever known the true meaning of sonship. He has not had the full fellowship with his father that filial love should bring. He has served as a hired servant, and takes it ill that his father has never given him by way of reward so much as a kid. His father reminded him with pained surprise that all the father had was his. If he had not enjoyed it, it was his mistake. The elder brother lacks not righteousness but love. Had he known a brother's love, his heart, too, would have leapt with joy at the news that the lost brother was home again. He had no conception of the moral change of repentance. To him the brother, however repentant and changed morally, would always be only the spend-thrift debauchee of other days. No wonder he was angry that the father should so reward the prodigal with a feast and neglect himself!

2. The elder brother represents those who put religion on a legal basis, serving not from pure filial love, but seeking to earn a reward. It was this attitude which led the Pharisees to despise sinners. Feeling no brotherly love for other men, they could neither appreciate nor rejoice over repentance, because the sinner's evil record was a final, unchangeable barrier to fellowship in their view. To them the grace of God was beyond comprehension. It seemed *unjust* to make effort to restore

the sinner since what he *deserved* was punishment rather than help, and it seemed wrong to rejoice over one whose sins were, in their view, a forever fixed and disgraceful fact. Their religion lacked love.

3. The elder brother may be, in Jesus' mind, one of the ninety-nine righteous persons who, in their own estimation, need no repentance (15:7). If so the language must be regarded as ironical. However, Jesus probably made the comparison of 15:7 between sinners and persons actually righteous. We must not make the mistake of thinking that the joy of these parables is a measure of absolute value. It is rather the natural expression of love at the recovery of its own. A man *rejoices* more over five dollars lost and found than over a hundred dollars secure in the bank, but he does not *value* the five dollars more. One who had never sinned would be worth more to God than a repentant sinner.

Sixth Day. *God's Counting.*

1. These parables give us a lesson in the way God counts with his heart. A child cannot count very far. Men and women count farther, but we all soon reach numbers that mean nothing to us. If a man had before him a pile containing a million silver dollars, he could never unaided know it, if some one slipped one away, and if he did miss one, he would not *feel* the loss. Does God have so many worlds of people that He does not know it when

one of us is lost; or care if one among the many does go astray?

2. Here is the lesson of God's counting as Jesus and the prophets give it: Two, Luke 15:11; Matt. 10:29. Five, Luke 12:6. Ten, Luke 15:8. A hundred, Luke 15:4. The number of the hairs of the head, Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7. Of the birds, Matt. 10:31; Luke 12:7b. Of the stars, Isaiah 40:26, 27.

"Father of all," he urges his strong plea,
"Thou lovest all; Thy erring child may be
Lost to himself, but never lost to Thee."

—Whittier, *The Cry of a Lost Soul*.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Re-read Luke 15.

2. The lesson of the three parables is the same, the fatherly love of God working to save sinners. The fullest and most concise expression of their main thought is found in John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8, 16. Perhaps Jesus added the parable of the Lost Coin to suggest that the love of God has the mother's tenderness as well as the father's strength. Would it not be truer to speak of the parenthood of God than merely of His fatherhood?

3. The first two of the parables lay the emphasis on the effort of God to save. This is one of the distinctive features of Christ's teaching. Other religions and religious teachers tell the sinner, in effect, that, if he can cleanse and reform himself so as to become righteous, God will receive him. Jesus teaches that God is a Saviour; that He ever seeks

the sinner that He may help him become righteous. When Jesus received and associated with sinners in order to win them back through repentance to righteousness, He was revealing God. Read the concluding paragraph of Browning's *An Epistle*.

4. The third parable lays the stress on the repentance, which is the final condition requisite for the recovery of the lost *man*. The beast can be laid on the shoulder and brought home, but all that love can do to save the lost man is to help him "come to himself" in repentance and to welcome him home with joyful forgiveness. Even the love of God must wait on human freedom.

"The sweet persuasion of His voice,
Respects thy sanctity of will:
He giveth day; thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still."

—Whittier, *The Answer*.

God can save the man only by winning him from his sinfulness.

LESSON III

THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM

First Day. *The Mustard Seed.* Matt. 13: 31, 32; Mark 4: 30-32; Luke 13: 18, 19.

1. The Kingdom of God. The best definition of the Kingdom of God is found in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6: 9-13). It is that condition in which God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom exists wherever there is one who is loyally obedient to God as a subject to his king (Luke 17: 21, *marg.*). The kingdom will reach its consummation when all men become members (Phil. 2: 9-11).

Jesus' other name for God's kingdom is God's family,—a condition in which men reverence, trust and obey God as their Father and love and help one another as brothers (cf. Mark 3: 35).

The kingdom is thus a spiritual state, which, while it affects the outward life, does not consist essentially of anything external (John 4: 21-24; Luke 17: 20; Rom. 14: 17). Men enter it by beginning a new spiritual life of filial loyalty to God and of brotherliness toward men (Matt. 18: 3; 19: 14; John 3: 3, 5). See the discussion and summary in Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Bk. 11, Chap. XI. (Vol. I., p. 270—Herrick Ed.)

2. The Mustard Seed. This is one of the parables given by Jesus as He taught by the seaside on

a certain day, when for the first time He taught exclusively in parables. The parables given on this occasion relate to the Kingdom of God as a whole: its growth, value and destiny. The parable does not relate a particular incident, but instances a common fact of life. The mustard seed is chosen because it was the smallest of common seeds yielding so large a growth. The central point is the great result springing from such a small beginning. The symbolism of the parable is apparent. The mustard seed is the Kingdom of God; the Man who sows it is Jesus; the field is humanity. The birds that lodge in the branches need not be interpreted. They are introduced to show how great the resulting growth becomes. The parable teaches the very great growth of the kingdom from its very small beginning.

Second Day. *The Mustard Seed* (Continued).

1. Consider how small was the beginning of the kingdom Jesus founded. Jesus appeared to the Jewish rulers as an unlearned Galilean peasant (John 7:15). His disciples belonged to the same class (Acts 4:13). Their efforts lacked the prestige that learning, wealth or aristocratic birth would have given. They had no support from army, government or church. To the casual observer, Jesus' movement did not have greater importance than that of hundreds of religious enthusiasts who troubled Judea from time to time with wild Messianic claims and small revolutionary bands (cf. Acts 5:36, 37; 21:38).

2. Consider also how great the kingdom has grown to be; how it has spread through the world and embraced nations; how it has enlisted the services of martyr, crusader, and missionary; furnished themes for poets, inspiration for artists and musicians, and subjects for scholars, until to-day Christianity embraces a large part of mankind.

3. Jesus' prediction of the growth of the Kingdom of God has been thus far verified. This gives us confidence that it will still more increase in extent. The missionary enterprise brings us face to face to-day with "religions more ancient and more outwardly impressive than our own." We are conscious of our moral defects, of the slackened zeal of many church members, of the paralysis of division, materialism and worldliness. We tend to become discouraged because after so many centuries so much remains to be done. But we need to remember that it is not the size but the vitality, not the present achievement but the power of the kingdom that we are to trust. Christianity still has unexhausted vitality.

4. The parable is not only true of the growth of the Kingdom of God among men, but also of its growth within us. If once planted in us, though our faith be but as a grain of mustard seed (Luke 17:5, 6) it has the potency to embrace the whole man, becoming victorious over our thoughts and affections as well as our wills, until "Christ be formed in us" (Gal. 4:19). (Cf. John 7:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thess. 5:23.)

Third Day. *The Leaven.* Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21.

1. Both Matthew and Luke assign this parable to the same occasion as that of the Mustard Seed. They are both alike in calling attention to a common fact of life. Three measures—nearly a bushel of meal—seem to have been the ordinary amount mixed for one baking (see Gen. 18:6; Judges 6:19; 1 Sam. 1:24). The yeast or leaven was thoroughly worked into the dough until it was “hidden.” The central point is the power of the small lump of yeast to transform the whole mass of dough. Leaven is usually used in the Bible as a symbol of evil, probably because fermentation was regarded as a corruption (see Ex. 34:25; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). But here Jesus uses it as a symbol of the kingdom. He teaches that good is as great a transforming agency as evil. The symbolism is very like that of the previous parable. The woman is Christ. The leaven is the kingdom. The meal is mankind.

2. Both parables “emphasize the small beginnings of God’s kingdom and predict the mighty and widespread growth which will follow. And they both alike show us the magnificent confidence the Saviour had in Himself, His mission and the kingdom which He had come to build up. In both parables we see the slow, steady, irresistible advance of the Divine thought and purpose ever broadening out, striking deeper and gaining more ground. And yet along with these resemblances there is one most noteworthy difference. The mus-

tard seed grows and expands outwardly, and openly; the leaven spreads quietly, imperceptibly, hiding its workings from the eyes of man" (*The Parables of Jesus*, by various authors, pp. 66, 67).

3. The lesson of the parable is the power of the kingdom to permeate and transform human life in all its aspects.

Fourth Day. *The Leaven* (Continued).

1. The parable "represents the spiritual and moral forces of the kingdom, its thoughts and sentiments, its laws and its ideals, moving on and getting themselves half unconsciously accepted, penetrating and permeating the life of the individual, and slowly diffusing themselves through the mass of human society" (*The Parables of Jesus*, by various authors).

2. Consider how far this leavening process has already gone; how many age-old, unchallenged evils and evil institutions which existed in Jesus' day have passed from the life of Christendom. Slavery, polygamy and tyranny have passed away as the leaven of the spirit of Jesus has worked in the world. A reading of such a book as Lecky's *History of European Morals* gives one a strong impression of the great transformation which the customs and spirit of European life have undergone.

3. Sometimes, when we read the Sermon on the Mount and realize how far the life of humanity is still from being in accord with Jesus' ideals, we are tempted to be discouraged. This parable of Jesus reassures us, however, that the leaven will continue

to work until *the whole is leavened*. Against war, and the saloon, the political disfranchisement of women, the injustice of our wage system, the wastes of competition, the cruelties of child labor, the struggle of the Spirit of Christ still seems to sway uncertain of the issue. But we have the moral progress of two millenniums to add to Jesus' prophecy in this parable for our encouragement.

4. It is strengthening to us at times to try to realize in imagination what will be the spirit of civilization and its social and moral expression when the whole shall have been leavened. Such a study is John's vision of the new Heaven and new Earth in Revelation 21, 22.

5. The moral transformation of the world begins with a change in the life of the individual. Individual character and destiny are not fixed by the stars, nor by heredity and environment. The leaven of the gospel can transform us into new and diviner characters. If we let Christ place the leaven of His love in us, we may become sons of God. Study John 3:3, 5; Eph. 2:1-22; Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Rom. 12:1, 2.

Fifth Day. *The Seed Growing Secretly.* Mark 4:26-29.

1. This parable, given by Mark alone, is, like each of the two preceding parables of this lesson, one of the parables spoken by the sea (Mark 4:1). In this parable the story does not purport to give a specific instance of a common fact, but gives a hypothetical case. This should prevent our laying

emphasis on the *story* in a parable as being an actual occurrence. It is only necessary that a parable be true to life. Often it gains in value by being an imagined story, since in that case the narrator puts in details only that are relevant to the teaching. The lesson of the parable is not the facts it purports to tell, but the spiritual truth it conveys.

2. The story of this parable has to do with one of the most common activities of farm life. The seed in this case is wheat or barley,—some grain that needs no cultivation after planting.

3. The central point of the story is found in the statement, "The earth beareth fruit of herself" (verse 28). The parable mentions the activity of the farmer at seed-sowing and harvest, but emphasizes his inactivity between these two points. He sleeps and rises as night and day require, but does not attempt to make the grain grow. That is beyond his sphere. He does not know how it grows and cannot therefore make it grow. On the other hand the earth bears the fruit itself without his knowledge or aid. The various stages of growth—the blade, the ear, the ripened grain—are mentioned not to emphasize the law of gradual growth, but to show that the earth brings the seed to fruition through all its stages.

4. The symbolism is clear. The seed is the Kingdom of God. Christ plants it. The soil is humanity.

5. The parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven illustrate the inherent vitality of seed and leaven; their power to grow and transform. This

parable illustrates the other side of the truth: the capacity of the soil to make the seed develop unaided by the personal care of the sower. Human nature is capable of developing the kingdom to its fruition, once Christ has planted it among men.

Sixth Day. *The Seed Growing Secretly* (Continued).

1. Just as the parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven emphasize Jesus' faith in the vital power of His movement, so this parable of the "fruitbearing earth," as it has been called, shows Jesus' faith in the possibilities of human nature. It is easier for most of us to believe in the goodness of God than to believe in the virtue and potential goodness of men. But Jesus knew what was in man (John 2:25) and so He trusted men. It was to common, sinful men that He gave commandment to love one another as He loved them (John 13:34) and to be perfect even as God is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Where they and their neighbors saw only their faults, Jesus saw their divine possibilities.

2. Consequently, Jesus confined His work to founding His kingdom. He seemed careless to a fault as to its future. He dropped His words half carelessly by the way among the multitudes; trained a few half-hearted disciples for a year or two; then went to His death. Compare Jesus' comparison of His work to kindling a fire (Luke 12:49, 50, *R. V. marg.*).

3. "Christ might have done all this work Himself, with His own hands. But He did not. The

crowning wonder of His scheme is that He entrusted it to *men*." "The usual methods of propagating a great cause were entirely disregarded by Christ. The sword He declined; money He had none; literature He never used; the church disowned Him; the state crucified Him. Planting His ideals in the hearts of a few poor men, He started them out unheralded to revolutionize the world." "Organizations, institutions, churches, have too much rigidity for a thing that is to flood the world. The only fluid in the world is man. War might have won for Christ a passing victory; wealth might have purchased a superficial triumph; political power might have gained a temporal success. But in these there is no note of universality, of solidarity, of immortality. To live through the centuries and pervade the uttermost ends of the earth, to stand while kingdoms tottered and civilizations changed, to survive fallen churches and crumbling creeds,—there was no soil for the Kingdom of God like the hearts of common men" (Drummond, *The Programme of Christianity*.)

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Re-read the parables.
2. Think how Jesus' faith in the future of Christianity has been verified by history. How ought this to affect our estimate of Jesus' character and work?
3. Ought we not to gain from the parables of this lesson a higher estimate of the possibilities of all men? Ought we to despair of the salvation of

any, however criminal, ignorant, depraved or heathenish?

4. The lesson should help us to present the claims of Christ and the truths of the gospel to men and women about us with greater faith in both the message and its reception by the hearer.

5. Compare the lesson of Isaiah 55: 10, 11 with 1 Cor. 3: 6, 7.

LESSON IV

THE STRUGGLE OF THE KINGDOM AGAINST EVIL

First Day. *The Sower.* Mark 4:1-9, 13-20;
Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15.

Mark's account may be made the basis of the study. The other accounts, although they differ in details, add nothing to the parable.

1. The story does not give an exceptional case, but the common happenings during the process of sowing grain in Palestine. The roads were for the most part simply paths running through or between the fields. There were usually no fences, so that the field alongside the way might be trampled hard by people walking beside the path. The rocky ground was where the limestone bed-rock which everywhere underlies Palestine came near the surface so as to leave only a very thin layer of soil above it. "Thistles" would be a better translation than thorns. "There is probably no country on earth of the same extent that has so many plants with prickles and thorns as the Holy Land" (*Hastings' D. B.*). Notwithstanding the fact that goats, asses and camels feed on most varieties of them, they "flourish and multiply and in many places take possession of the land." Even the soil that will grow grain varies in quality so that the yield varies greatly. A hundred-fold increase was not unknown in favored spots of Galilee.

2. The context. This is the first of the parables spoken to the crowds by the seaside as Jesus taught them from the boat. All the parables of this occasion have to do with the kingdom of God as a movement and spiritual opportunity. These parables followed the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebub, which evidenced the growing hostility of the Jewish leaders to Jesus.

Jesus Himself explained the symbolism of the parable to the disciples (Mark 4:13-20), and expressed the practical lesson in the exhortation of Mark 4:24, 25.

3. The central point of the parable is that, once the seed is sown, the result depends on and varies with the character of the soil. Strictly speaking this is not a parable of the Sower, but of the soil. The titles sometimes given, "parable of the field" or "parable of the divers soils," are more truly descriptive of it. Jesus Himself calls it the parable of the Sower, because of the Jewish custom of naming a narrative after the *first* prominent person or object mentioned in it (cf. Mark 12:26).

Second Day. *The Sower* (Continued).

1. The lesson of the parable is that the progress of the kingdom—the fruitfulness of the seed sown by Jesus—depends on the attitude of the hearers. As the hostility of the Jewish leaders developed and the masses showed themselves unreceptive, it must have tended to disturb the disciples' confidence in Jesus and His work. This parable was to warn

them not to expect immediate and universal acceptance of the gospel, to warn them to expect failures and to explain that such failures are not due to any defect in the kingdom, but to unreceptiveness on the hearers' part. The progress of the kingdom is conditioned by the hearers.

2. The parable shows in what varying degrees the message of the gospel may take hold of men,—some bearing no fruit and some becoming fruitful. Even among those whose hearts are "good soil" the degree of fruitfulness varies. Here, too, the diversity of results is due to man, not to the kingdom. Read Eccl. 11: 6.

3. These two lessons were for the disciples and other interested and responsive listeners, to teach them not to become discouraged and lose faith in the kingdom because of the unequal results of preaching the gospel. Another lesson of great practical importance for all is immediately suggested by the main teaching of the parable. We ourselves determine by our attitude whether or not we are fruitful soil for the truth of the gospel. Jesus puts it as an exhortation with a promise: "Take heed what ye hear. For he that hath, to him shall be given." Read Mark 4: 9, 23-25.

Third Day. *The Wheat and the Tares.* Matt. 13: 24-30.

1. The story. It is not unknown in the Orient at the present time for a man to sow his enemy's grain field with some troublesome weed. The tares were most probably the bearded darnel. "Cheat"

would express the meaning best to an American farm boy. The tares could not be distinguished from the wheat until the plants headed out.

2. The context and symbolism. The occasion of the parable is the same as that of the Sower. Jesus gives an interpretation of the symbolism in verses 36-43. It is to be noted that Jesus assigns a different meaning to the seed here from that given it in the preceding parable. There the seed is the word; here it represents members of the kingdom. Jesus does not give a meaning to the servants, because they are included in the class designated as the good seed and because the words of the servants are important rather than their identity.

3. The central point of the parable lies in the reply to the servant's question, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" The servants are forbidden to attempt to destroy the darnel, because they cannot do so without destroying wheat also, and because at the harvest God will do it rightly.

4. The lesson is that the servants of Christ must not undertake to rid the world of evil men by force. If they should attempt it they would destroy good men with the evil. On the other hand God Himself will, in the end, make a separation between the good and evil.

Fourth Day. *The Wheat and Tares* (Continued).

1. The parable of the Wheat and Tares follows that of the Sower naturally. On learning from the latter parable that the gospel would not win all men because it would not find effective lodgment in

some hearts, the question would naturally present itself, "Shall not the kingdom's triumph be accomplished by violently removing the evil men whom the spiritual power of the kingdom cannot win?" Jesus answers, "No." The good and evil influences are to develop together; the kingdom must progress by spiritual forces alone.

2. With this lesson of the parable compare the teaching of John 18:36, 37; Luke 6:27-36; Rom. 12:17-21.

3. A study of history shows how just is Jesus' prohibition of the use of violence to rid the church or the world of evil men; how true it is that men are not competent to destroy evil men without destroying the good also; and how damaging to the progress of Christianity every disregard of this injunction by Christians has been. The Crusades not only failed to supplant Islam by Christianity, but even to-day Mohammedans are the most difficult of all non-Christians to be won for Christ. The inquisition of the Medieval Church destroyed the choicest and best men, we now believe, that the age produced. The Thirty Years' War led to the moral and spiritual barrenness of Germany in the later eighteenth century, and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day found its fruition in the French Revolution.

4. It is the business of Christians to serve Christ in sowing the seeds of truth and love. We are competent to help and teach men, but the judgment of men for their final destiny must be left to God who alone is competent to effect a true separation

of the evil from the good (cf. Matt. 7:1-5; Rom. 14:10-13).

That God will finally make the separation is the assertion of the latter part of this parable and the lesson of the next to be considered.

Fifth Day. *The Drag-net.* Matt. 13:47-50.

1. The occasion. This parable is found in Matthew only. It is given as one of the three spoken by Jesus in the house after He had spoken to the multitudes by the sea (Matt. 13:36-53). Since it is the custom of the writer of the first gospel to supplement the important discourses of Jesus by teaching drawn from other sources bearing on the same subject, and since Mark explicitly tells us that as soon as Jesus finished teaching the multitudes by the sea, the disciples took Him as He was in the boat to the other side (Mark 4:35, 36), we cannot be sure just when the parables of the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price and the Drag-net were spoken.

2. The story. The net which is mentioned is a long draw-net or seine, used to enclose a small section of the sea and draw out all that is found in it.

3. The central point in the story is that after the haul was made not all the fish enclosed in the seine were preserved, but that the catch was sorted and the bad thrown away. In the process of seining it is impossible to know what is being taken until the seine is drawn up on the shore.

4. The lesson of the parable is plainly stated in verses 49, 50. The "end of the world" mentioned

in verses 40, 49 is, as the alternative translation in the margin of the R. V. shows, not the end of the physical earth but the consummation or completion of the world-age or dispensation. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came to set up His kingdom it would mark the end of the present (evil) age (cf. Gal. 1:4; Rom. 12:2) and usher in the age to come. Even though Jesus' kingdom was not outward (cf. Luke 17:20) and political, as the Jews expected it to be, He uses the common phraseology to designate the end of the period of His kingdom's struggle with evil and the time of its final triumph.

Sixth Day. *The Drag-net* (Continued).

1. The lesson of this parable is that the separation of the righteous and wicked is certain. While the parable of the Wheat and Tares teaches that good and evil men must be left in the world, not to be separated by human judgment and violence, the parable of the Drag-net shows that they are not on that account to continue forever thus.

2. The lesson of the two parables does not directly concern the punishment of crime by civil society nor the exercise of discipline by religious societies. Since in the one the field is the world and the tares are sons of wickedness, the question is of removing wicked men from the world by violence. In the other, the seine represents, not the church as an organization or collection of organizations, but the historic movement of the kingdom in the world. We have to look not merely at the charac-

ter of Christendom, but even at the bodies of professing Christians to see how mixed a company the movement has drawn in. There are those in the churches who are there merely because they were born of Christian parents or baptized in infancy, but who have never been born of the Spirit; those who make false profession for the sake of gain or social standing; men and women drawn by family or other social ties; men with loose morals and hidden sins, as well as true Christians.

3. The parable warns us not to think we or any others shall share the blessings of the Kingdom of God because in some outward and formal way we are included among those drawn in by the movement of Christianity. It is not enough to live in Christendom and profess Christ's name. God will make a separation and only those who are good according to the standards of the kingdom will be saved (see Matt. 7:20-27; Luke 13:23-29; 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

4. On the method of God's judgment see John 3:18-21; 5:22-24.

5. Subsequent lessons show what are the characteristics of the "good," who are kept, and the "bad," who are rejected.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Lesson III. presented the great possibilities of growth which the kingdom possesses when planted in the soil of humanity. The parables of this lesson show the limitations of that growth in actual experience. The kingdom must meet and

overcome evil. The parable of the Sower shows the cause of and responsibility for the unequal growth of the kingdom in different people. That of the Wheat and Tares tells what attitude the promoters of the kingdom may not take toward evil men in their midst. The parable of the Drag-net shows that the separation of the evil from the good, not outwardly made nor by man, is made by God through His own means.

2. Each of these parables should suggest candid self-examination. Are our attitudes to spiritual things, our habits, associations, reading and worship such as to make us receptive soil for the truth of the gospel? Do we seek to overcome evil with good only? Can the progress of the kingdom be hastened by war, according to Jesus' teaching? Are we truly members of the kingdom or only identified with Christianity in an outward and formal way?

3. Read again the parables of the lesson.

LESSON V

CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE KING- DOM OF GOD

First Day. *The Hid Treasure and The Pearl of Great Price.* Matt. 13:44-46.

1. These two parables are grouped in Matthew with the parable of the Drag-net as spoken to the disciples in the house after His teaching by the sea. What has been said concerning the time when the latter parable was given, applies equally to these two.

2. The story. The parable of the Hid Treasure presupposes the common habit in the East, where banks and safety vaults are unknown and wars and robberies frequent, of burying treasure for safe keeping. Frequently through the owner's death or departure such treasure was lost. When found, it belonged to the owner of the property on which it was discovered.

The other parable takes account of the value attached to precious stones in ancient times, both because of their ornamental value and because they were a form of wealth easily carried or concealed. The merchant in the story is traveling, like Marco Polo's uncle and father, that he may buy up such precious stones.

3. The central point of both parables is the same. In both cases when the man had found something

of superlative value he gave up all he had in order to get possession of it.

4. The treasure and pearl symbolize the Kingdom of God. The finder of the treasure and the merchant represent those who come to know the kingdom as the supreme good.

5. The lesson is that one must sacrifice all else that one has in order to obtain the Kingdom of God.

Second Day. *The Hid Treasure and The Pearl of Great Price* (Continued).

1. The parable of the Drag-net teaches that a discrimination is sure to be made between true and apparent members of the kingdom. The parables of this lesson show more in detail what true membership involves in the attitude and character of the individual.

2. The all-embracing condition of membership in the kingdom is complete consecration of one's self and all that one has. The kingdom has the supreme claim, and every interest not consistent with its character or subordinated to its purposes must be given up as the price of membership (see Matt. 6:24).

3. The lesson is fully and plainly stated by Jesus in His teaching as to the conditions of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35.

4. The differences between the parables have to do with the different ways in which men find the kingdom. One comes to the knowledge of the gospel, like the man who stumbles upon the buried treasure, while pursuing other things. Others, like

the merchant, are consciously seeking after God, and so find Him. In both cases the finder recognizes the supreme worth of the kingdom, and gives all to possess it (read Isaiah 65:1; Matt. 7:7, 8).

Third Day. *The Ten Virgins.* Matt. 25:1-13.

1. This parable is given by Matthew as one of a group spoken by Jesus in connection with His teaching concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. The discourse was uttered to the disciples while He was sitting with them on the Mount of Olives looking back upon the city and temple they had left shortly before (see Matt. 24:1-3).

This group of parables enforces certain principles of conduct which, in view of the uncertainty as to the time of the crises and opportunities of the kingdom's history, are essential for full and blessed membership in it (see Matt. 24:36, 42-51).

2. The story presents a variation from the usual Jewish marriage customs. Where the bride and groom lived in the same village, it was customary for the bridegroom to go with the wedding procession to the home of the bride and then return with her to his own or his father's house, where the wedding feast was held. This parable seems to assume that the bridegroom was to come from a distant village and that the wedding feast was to be held at the bride's home. The bridesmaids waited at the bride's home until the approach of the bridegroom was announced, when they went

forth to meet him and return with him to the bride's home.

The lamps carried consisted of an earthenware bowl for the olive oil, with a handle on one side and a spout or hole for the wick on the other side or on top. Sometimes the bowl was carried in a larger shallow receptacle. The wise virgins had brought their lamps with the bowls (vessels) filled and ready for use. The foolish had, either through thoughtlessness or the shiftless hope of borrowing of someone after arriving at the bride's house, neglected to put oil in their lamps.

Fourth Day. *The Ten Virgins* (Continued).

1. The central point of the story has been a matter of much difference of opinion. It seems fairly clear, however, from a careful study that the emphatic and central thought of the story is that the foolish virgins were excluded from the marriage feast because they had not made sufficient preparation beforehand. The wise virgins, on the contrary, entered the feast because the coming of the bridegroom found them ready for their duty.

2. The symbolism of the parable is clear, if we follow the example of Jesus as He explained the symbolism of the parables of the Sower and of the Tares and Wheat, and do not attempt to give a meaning to unimportant elements of the story. The bridegroom represents Christ, the ten bridesmaids represent those who are professedly and formally members of the kingdom; the marriage feast is the consummation of the kingdom.

3. The lesson is that membership in the kingdom will be finally determined by the personal preparation made beforehand. The ten virgins all seemed equally prepared. They were properly dressed and had their lamps. But the foolish had brought no oil. When at the cry that the bridegroom was approaching they lighted their lamps, they found they would not burn, and it was too late to provide the necessary oil.

Jesus' injunction to watch means, in this instance, not to be always idly looking out for some visible appearance of Christ—all the virgins wisely rested and slept while waiting—but to be inwardly and spiritually equipped for duty whenever the call comes.

Christian character is something which cannot be borrowed in emergencies. One must really have acquired it beforehand in order to do Christian duty and pass the tests imposed by the crises and opportunities presented in the course of the kingdom's fulfilment. Lack of it inevitably excludes from membership in the kingdom.

4. Compare Jesus' parallel illustrations of the wise and foolish builders in Matt. 7:20-27.

Fifth Day. *The Talents.* Matt. 25:14-30.

1. This parable is assigned by Matthew to the same occasion as that of the Ten Virgins. To the lesson of preparedness as a condition of membership in the kingdom this parable adds that of faithfulness in service.

2. The story. The talent was equivalent to

about \$1200. Each servant receives according to his ability to manage, so that each can hope to increase the amount received in the same proportion as the other servants, if all are equally faithful. It must have been no uncommon occurrence in Jesus' time for the Herods and other rich men leaving for Rome to leave their affairs in charge of servants.

3. The central point of the story is to be sought in the motive of the conduct of the servants, as shown in the conversation and judgment of the master. The first two are equally commended and rewarded because they have been good and faithful. The third is condemned as a wicked and lazy servant. It is often understood that he had not traded with the talent for fear he would lose it; but he himself says he feared his master, because he knew that whatever he gained his master would take up (verses 24, 25). He was unwilling to make money for his master—so unwilling that he had not even put the talent out to interest. He had treated the talent as he would a trust from a mere stranger, which he need only keep safe and return when it should be called for. A bad and idle *servant*, indeed! The saying, "To him that hath, shall be given," etc. (verse 29), while expressing a great truth, is introduced here to justify the giving of the unused talent to the one with ten talents, and is incidental to the main teaching of the parable.

4. Symbolism. The man represents Christ, who goes away at His death and returns for the reckoning at the Parousia (or as commonly translated, His Coming). The servants are professed

followers of Jesus. The talents represent the truths of the gospel and the spiritual gifts conferred by Christ upon men. The casting into outer darkness is exclusion from the blessedness of the kingdom, from the "joy of the Lord."

Sixth Day. *The Talents* (Continued).

1. The lesson of the parable is that loyal and faithful service to Christ is a necessary condition for membership in the kingdom and for entering into its rewards (cf. the teaching of Matt. 7:16-23; 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 4:1-5).

2. The parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-28) resembles that of the talents in some of its features so closely that it has been regarded as merely another account of it. The differences, however, are many and striking. Luke says Jesus spoke the parable of the Pounds on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem, because the disciples were expecting the kingdom shortly to appear. In it each of ten servants receives the same amount—a *mina* or pound, worth about \$20—and their differing capacity shows in the varying increase of each. The master is a nobleman, such as Archelaus, going away to receive a kingdom and come again. Some of his citizens are disloyal, protesting against his receiving the kingship, and being punished for their rebellion. Aside from this latter feature, however, the lesson of the parable is much the same as that of the Talents, the episode of the slothful servant who buried the money being given in almost the same words.

3. The common features of the two parables do not deal with natural gifts, such as we often call "talents," but with the gifts of the kingdom conferred for service. We repeat the mistake of the unfaithful servant whenever we refuse to use them for God's glory or seek to use them only for our own joy or salvation.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Read over the parables carefully.
2. They teach that complete consecration, personal preparation, and faithful service are necessary conditions of membership in the Kingdom of God.
3. This teaching should suggest a careful self-examination to see whether we are "fit for the Kingdom of God."
4. In these parables of Matt. 25:1-30 Jesus uses the language of Jewish Messianism, which expected a definite judgment day and a visible kingdom as the end of the (then) present world-age and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. He uses this language to cast the light of the kingdom's final triumph back upon the present life and duty of His disciples, to show what are the conditions of true and final participation in the kingdom. Since Jesus has spiritualized the conception of the kingdom, it seems better to take His language about His future coming and judgment at the consummation of the age as expressing the spiritual fact of Jesus' triumph and revelation through His Spirit's presence and work in human life and history.

LESSON VI

THE TREASURES OF THE KINGDOM

First Day. *The Rich Fool.* Luke 12:13-21.

1. The story. The decisive moment chosen in the wealthy landowner's life is when he discovered that the yield of his ground was extraordinary. He proposes to pull down his granaries, and build larger ones adequate to hold the crops. Instead of "soul" in verses 19, 20, it would be better to translate "life," as the margin suggests. This makes it agree better with verse 15.

2. The occasion of the parable was the covetous request of one of the crowd that Jesus get his brother to divide an inheritance with him. Perhaps it was a younger brother, who took it ill that the older brother should have the legal "double portion" (Deut. 21:17).

3. The central point of the parable is the folly of the man in thinking that his great wealth guaranteed long and happy life. His death, coming on the very day of his confidence, is the solvent that makes the folly stand out clearly.

4. The parable is not symbolic, but typical. It gives an instance of the foolish belief that life springs from and consists in the abundance of one's possessions.

5. The lesson of the parable is given by Jesus in verses 15, 21. Since human life is in essence spiritual, it cannot consist of, nor spring from, an

accumulation of material possessions, however abundant. Nothing shows this fact like death, which strips from a man the material accumulation and leaves only the life "that is rich toward God."

6. Read and ponder carefully Mark 10:17-27.

Second Day. *The Rich Fool* (Continued).

1. Following the parable and applying its lesson of the need of being rich toward God, Jesus gives a discourse (Luke 12:22-34) on the proper attitude toward the material and physical needs of life. Food, drink and clothing are necessary to life. The material means which secure them are to be regarded as subsidiary goods; but the righteousness of the Kingdom of God is the supreme good, which must be put first (Luke 12:30, 31; Matt. 6:33). Just as the body is of more importance than its clothing, so the life is of more value than food. Just because material possessions can only minister directly to what is secondary in man's life, it is foolish to make the gathering of them the supreme aim of life.

2. To lay up treasures in heaven (Luke 12:33; Matt. 6:19) and to be rich toward God mean to enlarge the spiritual life with the virtues, graces and activities that characterize God and His kingdom. To multiply unselfish friendships, to learn the secret of peace, to love the fellowship and communion of God, to grow tender in sympathy and in steadiness of faith and hope, to delight in nature as God's studio, and enlarge one's sphere of religious obligation—this it is to become "rich toward God."

3. Read Mark 10:21, 28-31. In contrast with the folly of the rich fool, note the wisdom of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

Third Day. *The Rich Man and Lazarus.* Luke 16:19-31.

1. The details of the first part of the story are such as to enhance our sense of the luxurious life of the rich man (cf. Esther 8:15). The purple was very costly woolen cloth dyed with the expensive dye made from the Tyrian shell-fish. Because of its cost, it was usually worn only by kings. The fine linen was the white Egyptian byssus. It was required that the priests' garments be made of it. Lazarus is presented as a foil to the rich man. The character of the rich man's life is still further brought out by contrast with the diseased and helpless beggar lying at his gate, coveting even the scraps thrown away by the rich man, and instead of finding compassion, being left helpless to the dogs. The name Lazarus must be regarded as significant, since Jesus has taken pains, contrary to His usual custom, to give this character a name. It seems to mean "God is the help," and probably was intended to express his religious character, so as to prepare us for his place in the second part of the parable.

2. The second part belongs to the parable as a story rather than to its teaching. To quote the apt words of Principal Stewart: "Christ took the features of His narrative from the beliefs and traditions of His time and doing so neither invests

them with authority nor stops to disprove them. His purpose is far otherwise. It would be strange indeed if the dreams of Jewish rabbis had succeeded in deciphering the relations, localities and conditions of the world of spirits. But this they would have done had our Lord in adopting their teachings as the framework of His story meant to certify their accuracy. It would have been strange indeed had Jesus, intending to reveal to men the hidden secrets, done so in so casual a manner. By using in regard to these things the current language of His day, He at once made Himself intelligible to those whom He addressed, and rebuked the restless spirit which would have overlooked the lessons He taught in the attempt to gratify a vain curiosity regarding the things which God keeps in His own hands" (*Parables of Jesus*, by various authors, pp. 438, 439).

The Jewish rabbis taught that the abode of the departed, called Sheol or Hades, was divided into two regions—Paradise, the abode of the righteous, and Gehenna, the place of torment (see Matt. 10: 28, *marg.*; Luke 23: 43). The two divisions, though separated by an impassable wall, fence or abyss, were in full view from each other and conversation between their denizens was possible. The righteous in Paradise were represented as holding a perpetual feast. A place of highest honor at a Jewish table was to recline next the host, so as to "lean upon his bosom" (see John 13: 23). "To lean upon Abraham's bosom at the celestial banquet was in the Jewish eyes the crowning felicity of Paradise" (cf. Luke 14: 15; 13: 28, 29). "Neither feast nor flame

can therefore be taken as throwing light on the physical conditions of the other world. So far as the parable is concerned they are representative and symbolic. But the spiritual realities to which they correspond are thereby only the more boldly and vividly impressed upon us."—*Principal Stewart*.

Fourth Day. *The Rich Man and Lazarus* (Continued).

1. Luke's grouping of the parables in chapter 16 seems to indicate that this parable belongs to the same general occasion as the parable of the Unrighteous Steward. If so, it may have been called out by the Pharisees' mockery expressed in verses 14, 15, notwithstanding the teaching on another subject that intervenes in verses 16-18. Jesus gives no comment or interpretation.

2. In seeking the central point of the story, we must find something that takes the whole parable into account. If the mere reversal of conditions were the central point the story should stop with verse 25. If the central point were the impassable gulf between the righteous and wicked in the next life, the story need not go beyond verse 26. The central point is to be found in verse 31, which gives the reason both for the manner of the rich man's life before death and his torment afterward.

3. The parable is typical, not symbolic. It gives a case of the poverty and torment of soul which come of using wealth to cultivate the physical life and sensual appetites only.

4. The lesson of the parable is well expressed

in the words of 1 John 2:16, 17; 1 Tim. 5:6; Luke 12:21. It has to do in both aspects of it with this life. The rich man's real life, his soul, was starved and shriveled. Apart from the flesh, he had no possibilities of happiness, no *life*. He lived in the flesh and found only torment aside from it. Death is introduced here because it is the needed solvent. It strips off to our imagination the mask of purple-robed flesh in one case and of ragged sores in the other and lets us see the real man's impossibilities of happiness, his poverty toward God.

5. The answer of Abraham (verse 25) to the rich man's request simply calls his attention to the logical working out of his own previous choices. When Lazarus lay at his gate, *he* did not trouble himself to assuage Lazarus' hunger or pain. He took his good things and left Lazarus to his evil lot. Lazarus was his opportunity to have developed a soul and to have had spiritual help. But having made his choice, he must abide by it. The "impassable gulf" belongs to the framework of rabbinic ideas. It is mentioned to emphasize how impossible it is for the rich man to be relieved of the consequences of his selfish sensuality and to prepare for his request that Lazarus be sent to his brethren.

6. The fundamental fault of the rich man is brought out in verses 27-31. The rich man's request for his brethren was made to justify himself. He intimated that *if he had been warned* of the torment awaiting him, he would have acted otherwise. The very selfishness that led him to sensual pleasure might have led him to a temporary self-denial

on earth that he might escape eternal torment, if he had been sure that such torment was otherwise inevitable. But he would not have been made to love God and man more by such a message, even if he had found it believable. He had Moses and the prophets; but his selfishness made him deaf to such appeals as Micah 6:8; Lev. 19:18; Deut. 15:7, 8. They offered no bliss he could appreciate.

7. Salvation must be a matter of character. Revelations of the future even by one returning from the dead would not save men unless they led to changed character. Moses and the prophets say little or nothing of the future world. But they do warn against covetousness, sensuality and all selfishness. They call us to the love of God and man. Unless we can hear and heed such messages, we cannot escape spiritual suffering and death.

Fifth Day. *The Unrighteous Steward.* Luke 16: 1-9.

1. The story. The steward in the parable is an agent who had charge of the rich man's property. He rented his farms and collected the rents, which in this case were paid in products of the farms. When accused to his employer and called to account for wastefulness—whether on account of incompetence, carelessness, or dishonesty is not told—he resorts to the dishonest but shrewd device of using the property the little time it was yet in his charge to make friends of his master's debtors, so that when he lost his position they would care for his needs. It was the shrewdness of the device that

elicited his master's admiration. The parable would be better named "the wise steward." He was an "unrighteous steward," but that is not the trait which the parable emphasizes (see verse 8, *R. V.* only). The phrase, "mammon of unrighteousness," seems to have been a common phrase for wealth. Among the Jews rich men were usually thought to be of necessity wicked. "Mammon" is simply the Aramaic word for money.

2. The context sheds no sure light on the occasion of the parable. We cannot be sure that this parable follows the group in Luke 15. It was spoken to the disciples (16:1). The parable really ends with 16:9, but verses 10-13 may have been uttered in connection with it. If so, verse 14 indicates that it was given in the hearing of the Pharisees. Jesus gives the practical lesson in verse 9.

3. The central thought of the parable is the wisdom of the steward in converting the money he must soon lose control of into friendship that would still serve his needs when the money could not do so.

Sixth Day. *The Unrighteous Steward* (Continued).

1. This parable is a typical one. The point in it that is typical is the *wisdom* with which the steward used the wealth while in his control. There is a strong tendency to regard it as a symbolic parable, but the fact that wealth must be the same both in the parable and in the interpretation, and that the steward's action was dishonest, prevents its being regarded as symbolic.

2. The lesson of the parable is that the wise way to use material wealth is to gain spiritual riches by means of it. All the material wealth that is used to gain friends human or divine, or to enrich one's mind and soul, will continue to help us after material things fail us, whether through calamity, disease, old age or death (see verse 9).

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Read over the preceding days' studies.

2. Does the following statement express Jesus' teaching as to the right use of material wealth? True life and weal do not consist in one's material possessions nor depend on them. True life is deeper and more abiding than the flesh and its appetites. Yet material wealth and the body may be so used as to enrich the life permanently and may, by the alchemy of consecration to spiritual uses, be converted into the treasures of the Kingdom of God.

3. In what ways may we "lay up treasures in the kingdom of heaven"?

LESSON VII

THE SOCIAL MEANING OF CITIZENSHIP IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

First Day. *The Unforgiving Servant.* Matt. 18:
21-35.

1. The story. The word servant here means "officer" rather than "slave." The one who owed ten thousand talents could hardly have been other than the king's treasurer. A talent was equal to about six thousand denarii. The former was worth about twelve hundred dollars and the latter a little more than fifteen cents. The debt of one was about twelve million dollars and of the other about fifteen dollars.

2. The occasion of the parable was Jesus' discourse to the disciples on humility and forgiveness (Matt. 18:1-20). This led Peter to ask Jesus how often one should forgive a repentant offender. Jesus' reply, "until seventy times seven," means that the obligation to forgive, when the offender repents (cf. Matt. 18:21; Luke 17:3), is unlimited. It is to show *why* this is true that Jesus gives the parable. In verse 35 Jesus gives the application of its lesson.

3. The central point to the story is that the servant who was debtor forfeited the king's grace by being unmerciful to a fellow servant who was a debtor to himself.

4. In the symbolism of the parable, the king represents God; the servant who owed the king

represents a sinful man; the debt of twelve million dollars is his duty which he has not performed; the fellow servant is a man who has wronged the other and his debt of fifteen dollars represents the wrong done. The other details belong to the framework of the parable and need not be forced to a definite meaning in the interpretation.

Second Day. *The Unforgiving Servant* (Continued).

1. For the lesson of the parable read the following passages: Matt. 18:35; 6:14, 15; Mark 11:25; Matt. 5:23, 24; Col. 3:13.

2. The king in the parable forgave the servant's great debt when the servant seemed repentant of his wrong. But his treatment of his fellow servant showed that he had not been touched and transformed by the king's grace. He had not felt the beauty of loving mercy. He was the same selfish and mean man who had embezzled the king's funds. His apparent contrition was only sorrow at having to suffer the consequences of his sin, not sorrow at having betrayed his master's trust. He had taken the king's mercy as a bit of good fortune that enabled him to enjoy the fruit of his sin without its penalties and he continued his career of selfishness by trying to collect all debts due him regardless of his debtor's feelings or needs. This action showed the king that he was not changed but was at heart the same man who had abused his trust; consequently the king revoked the decree of mercy of which the servant had proven unworthy. God does

not have to wait in order to learn the state of our hearts by our acts to see whether His love begets repentant love in us; so the lesson is not that God will *take back* His forgiveness from those who show themselves unmerciful, but that He does not forgive until brotherly love has been begotten of His grace in us (1 John 4: 7). This love is involved in true repentance.

3. Read Dods, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 129, 130; and G. A. Smith, *Expositor's Bible*, Isaiah 40-66, pp. 465-467.

4. Why does this spirit of forgiving one another have so little place in our songs, sermons and lives, while we make so much of God's forgiving grace? Is it because we are like the unmerciful servant?

Third Day. *The Good Samaritan.* Luke 10: 25-37.

1. The story. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was more active than between Jews and Gentiles. They had so much in common and lived so close to each other that their differences irritated each other more (see John 4: 9). The priests and Levites, ministers of the temple worship, belonged to the "holiest classes" of Jews. The inn was usually an enclosed place where travelers might find protection and shelter for the night—a caravansarai or khan. Often, as in the one mentioned in the story, a man would live there to feed and care for travelers who were willing to pay for such accommodation. The two pence or shillings were two denarii.

2. The occasion of the parable was the question which a lawyer or teacher of the Mosaic law put to Jesus in the hope of entrapping Him. The conversation is not given in full, but Jesus seems to have led him to state the substance of the law in the passages that He Himself used for that purpose (Matt. 22:34-40). When told that if he would do this he should have eternal life, the lawyer asked who his neighbor was, in order to justify himself—either for appearing to have asked his first question needlessly, or for limiting neighborly love to a very narrow circle. Among the Jews the term neighbor commonly meant a fellow Jew. In Lev. 19:13-18, it is parallel with “brother” and “son of thy people.” In Matt. 5:43-47, “neighbor” is contrasted with “enemy,” which plainly means “foreigner”—Gentile, Roman persecutor or publican. Among the Pharisees the term “neighbor” had been still more restricted to mean a fellow member of the Pharisæic order; somewhat as to-day “brother” often means member of the same lodge or order. Jesus gives the practical lesson of the parable in verse 37.

Fourth Day. *The Good Samaritan* (Continued).

1. The parable is of the typical class. Jesus answers the lawyer's question by giving a case of true neighborliness. The point to the story lies in the fact that none upon whom the needy man had any claims rendered him assistance, and that the Samaritan who did help him had no obligation but that imposed by mere human need. His fellow

countrymen rob and beat him; the ministers of his religion pass by on the other side, while the Samaritan is a hated foreigner. Notice how the whole group are thrown together by the accidents of travel as shown by the words, "fell," "by chance," "in like manner," "as he journeyed." None of the conventional motives to kindness is present—neither proximity of dwelling, nor community of race, country or creed. The Samaritan was neighbor to him because he felt a neighbor's love for the man as a man.

2. Jesus makes the obligation of neighborly love include all men. A man because he is a man has a neighbor's claim to every other man's unselfish love. How the petty barriers and distinctions by which we excuse ourselves—whether Jew, Greek or American—from loving and helping men of other races, countries, communities, organizations and religions, as we do "our own people" and ourselves, fade away before this human neighborhood of Jesus!

3. Compare carefully Paul's teaching in Acts 17:26, 27; and Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:43-47. Notice how both ground this universal neighborhood in the fact that we are all children of one Father, whose care is impartially given to all.

4. Read the sermon on "The Good Samaritan" in *The Forgiveness of Sins*, by G. A. Smith.

Fifth Day. *The King's Judgment.* Matt. 25: 31-46.

1. This passage is quite commonly taken as a

literal prediction rather than as a parable. A few call it the parable of "the sheep and goats," but this is to name it after an incidental illustration in it. The story is about the king's judgment. Against its being a parable may be urged that it lacks the usual introductory formula, and that it is in form a narrative of a future event. In favor of its being a parable, it may be said that many parables lack an introductory formula (see Matt. 13:3; 21:28; Luke 15:11; 16:1, 19) and that the story occurs here in a group of parables intended to throw the light of the future consummation of the kingdom on present duty. The framework is drawn, like the latter part of the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and like the illustration in Matt. 12:44, 45 (which Edersheim considers a parable), from the speculations of the rabbis about the spiritual world. Such pictures of judgment scenes are common enough in Jewish literature of New Testament times. The new and original element in the story is the *basis* of the judgment. I shall treat it as a parable; doing so with greater assurance, because the important lesson of it is just the same whether it is regarded as a parable or as a prediction of literal occurrences.

2. This parable belongs with the Ten Virgins and Talents to the group attached to Jesus' discourse in which He seeks to shed the light of the kingdom's consummation upon present duty; and to show what are the conditions of membership in the kingdom. The parable of the Virgins emphasized personal preparation as a prerequisite for admission; that of the Talents called attention to the

necessity of faithful service to Christ; and this shows that such loyal service consists in ministering to human need.

Sixth Day. *The King's Judgment* (Continued).

1. The central point of the story is that men's fate in the judgment was determined by their attitude to their fellow men.

2. The parable must be regarded as symbolic. The outward elements of the story (just as the similar things in Rev. 21, 22), the king in his splendor, the throne, the concourse of all nations, and the dialogue are not mentioned to give us a literal description of future occurrences, but to represent the triumphant rule of Jesus over the spirits of men, His spiritual presence and kingdom reaching all nations, the division of men into those who are led by His spirit of love and those who do not yield to it; the exclusion from His kingdom of all who do not yield to Him and cooperate with Him in His work of helping and redeeming men. (Cf. Gal. 5:22, 23; John 3:18-21; 5:24; 1 John 3:14-18, where the same truths are stated without the conventional symbolism of Jewish Messianism.)

3. The lesson of the parable is that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of love, and only those who live lives of altruistic self-denial belong to it. To love God is to love men and to serve God is to serve men. How often this truth is emphasized by Jesus and the apostles! (Read Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:35; 1 John 4:20, 21.)

4. Leigh Hunt's poem, *About ben Adhem*, is another parable expressing the same truth.

5. In the complications of modern life we may best minister to Christ's needs in the practice of our profession. We recognize easily that the minister and teacher and the physician must use their profession to minister to men's needs, and we regard them as unworthy if they make their own selfish ends the chief purpose of their profession. But the grocer who makes it his business first of all to feed as best he can Christ's hungry brethren is truly serving Christ. (He ought to get a living from it, to be sure, just as a minister must "live of the gospel.") So the director of a water company ought to use his position to give drink to the thirsty Christ; the clothier, to clothe Him; the physician, to heal Him; and the lawyer, to release Him from unjust imprisonment.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Read again the parables of the lesson. One shows the source in God's grace of Christian brotherly love; the second shows its universal extent; and the third shows its result in determining destiny. To belong to the Kingdom of God is to love all men with the same kind of forgiving, redeeming mercy which God shows to us.

2. How small a place is given to this test of Christianity in most of the standards and tests by which we measure our own and others' religion! Sometimes creeds, confessions, rites and experiences are considered proof of discipleship, when

love is wanting. And frequently in the absence of other and outward tests how loath we are to accept Christlike love as proof that men have been begotten of God and have passed from death unto life! (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14.)

3. Make a list of the un-Christian things of Christendom which would pass away, if the forgiving spirit, universal brotherliness and religion of human service taught in these parables were really present—such as personal quarrels; factions and schisms in the church; neighborhood feuds; wars, trade reprisals between nations, race riots and hatreds; selfishness in business, unrelieved poverty, destitution and disease, filthy jails, etc.

LESSON VIII

PETITIONING THE KING

First Day. *The Pharisee and the Publican.* Luke 18: 9-14.

1. The story. The name Pharisee means "separated." The Pharisees were a sect or order who devoted themselves to the study and observance of the oral and written law. They are generally described as formally though not inwardly righteous, as proud, self-satisfied and hypocritical (see Matt. 5:20; 6:1-18; 23:1-35; Mark 7:1-13; John 7:45-49). The publicans were collectors of customs. The customs were farmed out, the highest bidder receiving the privilege of collecting the duties for a district or at a port of entry. Both because the publicans represented the hated Roman power and because of their great opportunity to practice extortion, they were despised and ostracized by the Jews (see Luke 3:12, 13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 19:1-10; Matt. 21:32).

It was common for Jews to go to pray in the temple courts at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices (Luke 1:10; Acts 3:1).

2. The parable was spoken, if Luke's order is chronological, toward the end of Jesus' Perea ministry. It was intended as a lesson for the Pharisees, as verses 9 and 14 show.

3. It is a typical parable, giving a case of the wrong kind of prayer and one of the right kind.

The central point is that the sinful publican received a blessing because he asked for one; while the Pharisee, though a much better man, did not go to his house justified because he had not really prayed. He came to ask God neither for righteousness nor strength nor guidance. He had all he wanted, and simply came to tell God that he was perfect and needed nothing more; and perhaps primarily to let people see how devout he was, though this latter is not expressed in the parable.

4. The parable teaches that the proper spirit of prayer is the spirit of humble, penitent desire to be made better. It is very accurately expressed in Matt. 5:3, 4, 6.

Second Day. *The Pharisee and the Publican* (Continued).

1. Jesus insists constantly in His teachings that humility, hunger of soul, a sense of imperfection and aspiration after the highest are necessary before God can bless one of us with the blessings of His kingdom (see Matt. 18:3, 4; Mark 10:13-16).

2. Jesus never rated men by their actual attainments so much as by their faith, the direction of their faces, the character of their ideals, and the energy of their efforts. The repentant prodigal was not as good in actual deeds and character as his elder brother, but he had greater promise. The publican had greater prospects for attaining the higher righteousness than the Pharisee, though the Pharisee was virtuous and the publican a sinner. The publican wanted to be better, felt his sinful-

ness, mourned over it, prayed for mercy, and was satisfied because he hungered for righteousness. The Pharisee in his self-satisfaction could go no further. The one thing hopeless to Jesus was "ossification of heart."

3. As an example of the aspiration that underlies all true communion with God, read 1 Cor. 2:9; Phil. 3:7-14.

Third Day. *The Friend at Midnight.* Luke 11:5-13.

1. The story is not given as a narrative of fact, but as a hypothetical case depending for its result on common traits of human nature. The obligation of hospitality among the Jews would require arousing a friend at midnight if that were the only way to get bread to give the belated traveler. The "loaves" are not to be thought of as modern baker's loaves. They were round, flat cakes and rather hard. The doors to eastern houses were often ponderous, made of stone or timber, with heavy hinges and bars. It would be a task to open one.

2. The occasion of the parable was, according to Luke's order, a request from some of Jesus' disciples that He teach them to pray as the Baptist had taught his disciples. Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer in response and then added the parable (Luke 11:1-4). The most likely time known in Jesus' ministry for this event is just after the events recorded in Mark 1:16-38.

In the verses that follow the parable (Luke 11:9-13), Jesus comments on the lesson of it.

3. The central point of the story is given in verse 8.

4. The parable gives a typical instance of successful prayer. The case is typical only in the one point of the importunity of the petitioner which results in the granting of his request. To press it beyond that point or to interpret it as a symbolic parable would ascribe an unworthy motive to God in granting men's prayers.

Fourth Day. *The Friend at Midnight* (Continued).

1. The lesson of the parable is that men should be persevering and earnest in prayer.

2. The reason why perseverance leads to success will not be the same with God as with the friend. The argument is the *à fortiori* so often used by Jesus. If one can by persistence secure what he wants from an unwilling friend at midnight, how much more shall we persist in asking for what we need from One who is our Father? (11:11-13.)

3. The character of the petitions should be noted as a limitation in Jesus' own thought as to the universal efficacy of persistent prayer. The Lord's Prayer contains petitions only for things that are morally right and according to God's loving providence and His will for our spiritual and physical welfare. In the parable itself the request is not for the petitioner's self, but for a needy friend. It is the justice and unselfishness of it that gives his importunity its power. In the illustration that follows,

the son's requests of the father are all for food the son needs and which his father is under obligation to provide (verses 11, 12). The final argument extends only to God's willingness to give the Holy Spirit (verse 13). Matthew in the parallel passage has "good things" (Matt. 7:7-11).

4. If we are asking for anything *according to His will*, we should persevere in confidence. God is not less influenced by our needs and welfare than men are.

Fifth Day. *The Unrighteous Judge.* Luke 18: 1-8.

1. The story. The law required that judges should be appointed in every city (Deut. 16: 18-20). This one is represented as lacking those qualifications which the law required. The widow had no husband to avenge her or to compel respect from the judge and had no money to bribe him. Her perseverance is such that the judge pretends to fear that she will finally assault him. The word translated "wear me out" means to "beat black and blue," "to bruise," "to assault."

2. The occasion of the parable was the discourse on the coming of the kingdom and "the day of the Son of man" given in 17:20-37, in which Jesus describes the universal triumph of the Christ and the judgment that accompanies it. But the judgment of evil and reward of the righteous often seem not only delayed but forgotten of God. The parable is for those who may be tempted to aban-

don the prayer, "Thy kingdom come" (18:1, 8). Jesus Himself states the lesson in verses 6-8.

3. The central point of the story is given in verses 4, 5. Like the parable of the Friend at Midnight, this is a typical parable presenting a case where prayer avails through sheer importunity. The woman had no other means of appealing to the judge; her case seemed hopeless; but she won with the simple weapon of an earnestness that refused to be denied.

4. The lesson is the same as that of the preceding parable, but it is given a special application. It is for the coming of Christ's kingdom, for deliverance from evil, and for the reward of righteousness that we are taught to pray and not become discouraged at long delay (verses 7, 8; cf. Rev. 6:9-11).

Sixth Day. *The Unrighteous Judge* (Continued).

1. Jesus' application of the parable (verses 6, 7) expressly forbids any attempt to make this a symbolic parable and consider the judge as representing God. The lesson is to be found in the spirit of the petitioner. Jesus expressly contrasts God with the judge in respect to their character and motives. The argument is the *à fortiori* again. If sheer persistence could move such a wicked man to listen to a prayer for deliverance from injustice, how much more will God, our wise and loving Father, hear the continual prayer of His chosen people for deliverance, even though He be long-suffering toward their oppressors? (Cf. Rom. 2:4-11.)

2. We are apt to become impatient and dis-

couraged at the slowness of the world's progress, especially when our hearts are hot with hate of injustice or we are enamored of the vision of a righteous world to be. Jesus would encourage us to pray and persevere by this illustration of how far such an attitude will carry even with a human judge lacking all the characteristics to which our prayer must appeal in God. He would strengthen our hands with a hope born of experience with men and nourished on trust in God.

3. The persons to whom Jesus addressed the parable (18:1) might well have made Psalms 42, 43 the expression of their feelings, when the parable had taught its lesson.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. As the last lesson dealt with the social relations of members of the kingdom, this deals with their relation to God.

2. Humility, trust and steadfastness are the elements that bring us into vital relations to God, so that He can bless us, work out His purposes through us and harmonize our wills to His.

3. It is well to review here the teaching of Jesus in regard to prayer. It is best expressed in the following passages outside of those treated in this lesson (Matt. 6:5-15; Mark 11:22-25; Matt. 18:19, 20; John 15:16; 16:23, 24; Mark 14:35, 36). These passages teach that God knows and provides for the needs of all His creatures; He does not need that we tell Him these. Prayer is neither to give Him information nor to render Him

willing by flattery or persuasion to grant our requests. He is eager to give good gifts to those that ask Him; to give the Holy Spirit most of all. Faith in Him as our Infinite Father, surpassing even ourselves in love and wisdom, must be the basis of all genuine prayer. There is no thought that He will do what is evil or harmful at our request, however urgent. It is always to those gathered in Christ's name or praying according to God's will that promises of granted requests are made.

Requests that are answered by a refusal enable us to know what is best in God's eyes and help us to understand His will. Constant communion binds us in fellowship to God; prayer for our daily needs and thanks for His common blessings knit us to the Father's heart in love and gratitude. In hours of trial and temptation we find with Him in prayer strength to aid us and we seek there to discipline our wills to harmony with His own.

For attaining all this we must pray humbly and receptively with the constancy and fervency of great hunger for righteousness and great love and faith toward God.

LESSON IX

UNFIT FOR THE KINGDOM

First Day. *The Two Sons.* Matt. 21:28-32.

1. The story is so simple and turns on differences of disposition so common in all ages that it needs no comment or elucidation.

2. The parable is one of the three parables of warning spoken by Jesus to the Jewish leaders on Tuesday of Passion Week. The leaders were endeavoring to alienate the crowds from Jesus so that they might arrest Him without precipitating a riot (Matt. 26:4, 5). They had asked Him for His authority as a teacher, hoping that the crowds would leave Him when they learned that Jesus was not a recognized or authorized rabbi (Matt. 21:23-27). Jesus thwarted their purpose by asking whether John the Baptist taught by divine authority or simply as a man. This put them in a dilemma where they could not answer either way without bringing themselves instead of Jesus into disfavor with the multitude (21:25-27). On their confession that they did not know the source of John's teaching, Jesus uttered the parable.

An application of the lesson of the parable is made by Jesus Himself in verses 31, 32.

3. The central point of the parable lies in the contrast between the words and deeds of the two sons. The one who refused in words actually did what his father wanted.

4. The first son represents the ostentatiously

righteous leaders of Judaism, particularly the Pharisees. The second son represents the outcasts and sinners. The father stands for God and the vineyard for His kingdom.

5. The lesson is concisely stated in verse 31b.

Second Day. *The Two Sons* (Continued).

1. The immediate application of the parable was to the two classes into which the Jewish people had come to be divided on the basis of keeping the law. The Pharisees and other members of the theocracy were loud and persistent in their profession of keeping God's commandments. Another class—publicans, harlots, sinners—openly made no claim to doing what the law commanded. Then came the preaching of John calling men to walk in the way of righteousness and a curious reversal of judgment followed. The sinners repented of their sins and made preparation of heart to enter the kingdom of righteousness, and the self-righteous leaders stood aloof.

2. The difference between profession and deeds, when a call comes to go at once (to-day) into the work of God, is not confined to the case to which Jesus applies it (read Matt. 15:8, 9; 7:15-23). How often we find men who make full confession of Christ and profession of righteousness who are strangely wanting in every call to do something difficult in the work of God, who do not lead in efforts of reform, benevolence, or practical righteousness! On the other hand many a wild, unconventional, reckless character, blunt and outspoken

against conventional religion, is found in the crisis doing the work of Christ when others stand aloof. We ought to avoid the faults of both classes, but in any case we must remember that the essential thing is *to do* God's will.

Third Day. *The Unprofitable Servant.* Luke 17: 7-10.

1. The story speaks of a farmer and a slave whom he owns. The slave is bound to do whatever his master commands and his owner has him do both the farm work and that of a body servant.

2. Sometimes the parable is held to be connected with the preceding discourse on faith, but most scholars regard it as having no connection. Jesus gives an application of the parable to His disciples in verse 10.

3. The central point of the story lies in the fact that the master does not regard the slave's obedience as grounds for gratitude or thanks. According to the circle of ideas within which the parable moves thanks would be expected or given only for some gratuitous or unexpected service over and above what was commanded or otherwise due. With Oriental hyperbole, the slave who had only obeyed orders would call himself a "good-for-nothing slave."

4. The parable is a typical one, illustrating the difference between the service that is mere slavish obedience to commands and the service that through willingness of spirit and the eagerness of love wins gratitude by exceeding the letter of the law.

Fourth Day. *The Unprofitable Servant* (Continued).

1. The parable is intended to call attention to the difference between the religion of legalism and that of Christ. The Pharisee expected to win the admiration of men and the grateful commendation of God by merely keeping the commandments. Jesus points out that there is no special merit in that; it is only doing bare duty. The service of love, which Christ seeks to lead to, asks, not how little must we do to escape God's judgment, but how much can we do to please Him and express our love and gratitude to Him.

2. The injunctions of Matt. 5: 38-48 teach something more than passive yielding to necessity; they urge helpful kindness over and above what the commandment requires. Paul illustrates the difference between the free service of the sons of God and the "unprofitable" service of slaves in His own case in 1 Cor. 9: 14-23.

3. In the light of this parable have we found the true spirit of Christian service as long as we approach the problems of life, asking how little we may do for Christ and yet be a Christian?

Fifth Day. *The Laborers in the Vineyard.* Matt. 19: 27—20: 16.

1. The story assumes that it was customary for men seeking employment to wait in the marketplace. The word translated "penny" or "shilling" is the *denarius*, worth a little more than fifteen cents, but a common day's wage in Palestine in

Christ's time. The laborers were hired by the day and paid at sunset.

2. The occasion of the parable was Peter's question (19:27). The rich young ruler had refused to distribute his wealth to the poor that he might follow Jesus and acquire heavenly treasure (19:16-22). Peter calls to Jesus' attention the fact that the apostles had done what the young ruler declined to do, and asks, "What shall we have?" Jesus replies that they shall have ample reward, but warns him that these rewards are not to be reckoned on any formal or outward basis of time spent or labor performed. Many that are first by such reckoning shall be last in the distribution of the kingdom's rewards. To show how and why this shall be is the purpose of the parable.

3. The central point in the story is found in the fact that those hired at the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours had been idle up to the time they were hired, because no man had hired them. They went into the vineyard as soon as they had the opportunity and did all they could. The owner rewards them according to their desire and purpose. That they had not come earlier and done more was because of lack of opportunity and not through any fault of theirs.

Sixth Day. *The Laborers in the Vineyard* (Continued).

1. The parable is symbolic. The vineyard is the Kingdom of God; the owner is Christ; the laborers are followers of Jesus.

2. The lesson is that in the Kingdom of God priority of membership or amount of service will not entitle one to preeminence over another with less to his account, if the inequality of results be due to lack of opportunity. It is willingness that counts (see 2 Cor. 8:12).

3. The apostles have no preeminence over twentieth century Christians merely because they were first in time. A man's ecclesiastical office entitles him to no preeminence over the humblest layman, to whom no office has given opportunity to show capacity. If we were able to look beyond the outward appearances and position and see the real character as God does, how many that we reckon first would be last and last first!

4. Rewards in the spiritual kingdom are based on spiritual things. The man with two talents, in the parable of the Talents, received the same commendation as the man with five, not because he had earned equally much, but because he had been equally faithful.

"Not on the vulgar mass
Called 'work' must sentence pass.
But all the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's
amount;
Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,

All men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher
shaped."

—*Browning, Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. The parables of this group call attention both positively and negatively to certain types of character that easily pass for religious and yet which Jesus brands as unfit for His kingdom.

2. The first is that which makes ready profession of obedience to God, but always stop short of actual performance of the Master's will.

3. The second is that which is satisfied to observe the letter of the commandments and expects approval for doing so much. As if we should call a man a good citizen who merely kept within the letter of the laws enough to escape punishment as a criminal!

4. The last is that which undertakes the service of Christ in a bargaining spirit with the reward the most prominent matter in mind; and which wishes service rated according to outward tests of time and work.

5. Review them all carefully.

LESSON X

THE JEWISH NATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

First Day. *The Barren Fig Tree.* Luke 13: 6-9.

1. The story. The fig tree was exceptionally well situated, according to Jewish ideas, because planted in a vineyard. The fact that the owner had failed to find fruit on it for three successive years after it ought to have been bearing fruit was proof of its barrenness. The barren tree was not only useless, but it deteriorated the soil by drawing the moisture out so that vines could not grow near it.

2. The parable was spoken during the Perea ministry of Jesus. Ever since the time of the transfiguration it had been clear to Jesus that the nation would reject Him, and in so doing seal its own doom (see Luke 9:18-36). The immediate occasion of the parable according to Luke's order was the incident recorded in Luke 13:1-5. Jesus denies the favorite Jewish doctrine that exceptional suffering or misfortune is proof of exceptional sinfulness and tells His hearers that such calamities as the Galileans and Jerusalemites had recently suffered were but a premonition of the doom awaiting the whole nation unless they should all repent.

3. The central point lies in the fact that the fruitless fig tree was given a brief respite through the mercy of the owner while the vinedresser worked with it, and that if then it should prove unfruitful its destruction was certain.

4. The vineyard represents the world; the fig tree the Jewish nation; the owner stands for God; and the vinedresser, if he is to be interpreted at all, stands for Christ.

5. The lesson is that the Jewish nation, having long failed to bear true fruit of righteousness, is given a brief respite while Christ tries to make it fruitful, and if it fail then, its doom is decreed (cf. Isaiah 5: 1-7).

6. The lesson is true of individuals as well as nations. One who does not do the work God calls him to must be removed from his post that the work may be done. An idler is in the way of some one who would do the service faithfully (see Rom. 2: 4).

Second Day. *The Wicked Vinedressers.* Matt. 21: 33-46; Mark 12: 1-12; Luke 20: 9-19.

1. The story. Compare the details in the preparation of the vineyard with those in Isaiah 5:
2. The wine press was a vat usually hewn out of stone in which the grapes were placed that the juice might be pressed out by treading them with the bare feet (cf. Isaiah 63: 2, 3). The hedge—usually a stone wall—was to protect the vineyard from beasts and the tower was for the watchman who guarded the vineyard against thieves. The vineyard was rented to the husbandmen or vinedressers for a certain proportion of the fruit. Notice the art with which Jesus gets the hearers to pronounce judgment on the wicked vinedressers, in Matt. 21: 40, 41 (cf. 2 Sam. 12: 5, 6).

2. This parable is one of the three parables of warning uttered on the same occasion as that of the Two Sons. The lesson is plainly stated by Jesus in Matt. 21:43.

3. The central point of the story is the destruction of the vinedressers who beat the owner's servants and killed his son in the hope of possessing the vineyard themselves, and the letting of the vineyard afresh to husbandmen who would render the rents when due (Matt. 22:41).

4. In the symbolism of the parable, the vineyard is the Kingdom of God; the owner, God; the servants, the prophets; the son, Jesus; the husbandmen, the Jews; the other husbandmen to whom it will be let out, the Gentiles.

5. The lesson is concisely put in Matt. 21:43. The quotation in Matt. 21:42 is from Psalm 118:22, 23. It seems to be founded on an old Jewish tradition that at the building of the temple a stone for which the builders could find no place during the progress of the work, proved to be the missing capstone of the corner at last. Matt. 22:44 is missing in many manuscripts of the gospel. It takes up the figure of verse 42 comparing Jesus to a stone and speaks of the fate of one who should stumble over the stone or upon whom it might roll down.

Third Day. *The Wicked Vinedressers* (Continued).

1. In the parable Jesus sets forth very plainly the fate of the Jewish nation and the reasons for

its destruction and forecasts the future acceptance of the gospel by the Gentiles.

2. The destruction of the Jewish nation is determined by its rejection of Jesus. The reason for their killing Him is that they wished to enjoy God's kingdom for themselves rather than to render to God the fruits of righteousness and world-wide service which He called upon them to render. The same selfish spirit is expressed in cynically plain words by the high priest and Pharisees in John 11:47-50.

3. The general principle involved in the parable is as applicable to individuals as to nations. Ability implies responsibility. Men are "saved to serve." All God's gifts are trusts to be used for His work. Whether it be wealth, mental or social talents, or spiritual graces, that have been received, the recipient must use them so as to render fruit unto God, or else pay the penalty of those who shirk the responsibility of their privileges.

4. Do we cherish our religious privileges and membership in God's kingdom solely or chiefly for the peace, safety, reputation and other blessings they confer on ourselves, and think little or not at all of the obligations to God and others they impose? If so, are we really better than the vine-dressers of the parable?

Fourth Day. *The Great Banquet.* Luke 14:15-24.

1. The story. The parable assumes a custom, still practiced in the East, of sending two invitations to a feast—the first a general invitation, the

second a notification at the time of the feast. To decline the second invitation after accepting the first was a deadly insult. The excuses offered in the parable with varying degrees of courtesy merely show that the invited guests were more interested in their own possessions than in the pleasure of their host. The streets are the broad places or avenues of the city, the lanes narrow alleys. Those traveling the highways or camping at night along the hedgerows would be travelers outside the city.

2. The occasion of the parable is found in the remark of one of the Pharisees at the feast described in Luke 14:1-14. Jesus gave advice as to true hospitality and stated that those who invited men to their feasts out of kindness, not expecting a return in kind, would be recompensed in the resurrection of the righteous. One of His hearers, thinking that as good Jews they were sure of participating in the feast which they thought of as the supreme felicity of the children of Abraham in the Kingdom of God, interjected the pious remark of verse 15. Jesus tells the parable to show the danger of the Jewish leaders' missing that very blessedness.

3. The central point is the exclusion of the invited guests who were preoccupied with their own affairs, and the participation in it of those not first invited but hastily gathered from the city streets and country roads.

Fifth Day. *The Great Banquet* (Continued).

1. The symbolism is transparent: The feast is

the Kingdom of God; the maker of the feast is God; the invited guests, the Jewish leaders; those from the city's streets and lanes, the outcasts and sinners; those from the highways and hedges, Gentiles.

2. The lesson of the parable is the deposition of the Jewish upper classes from their positions of influence and privilege and the admission of outcasts and Gentiles into the Kingdom of God.

3. Here again the principles are just as applicable to individuals of all races and ages. None dare to presume upon their privileges as if special favorites of God and believe that blood or culture or some other trait will cause God to overlook indifference to His invitations and purposes.

4. Read Luke 13:22-30.

Sixth Day. *The Royal Marriage Feast.* Matt. 22:1-14.

1. This parable resembles that of the Great Banquet much as the parable of the Pounds resembles that of the Talents. In this parable the maker of the feast is a king and it is the wedding feast for his son. In keeping with this he sends his armies to burn the city of the rebellious subjects who scorned his invitation and slew his servants. The feast is filled with guests gathered from the highways outside the rebellious city. Thus far the parable runs closely parallel with that of the Great Banquet with only the added elements due to the royal dignity of the king and the occasion.

2. The lesson of the parable thus far is closely

allied also to that of the Great Banquet. The king represents God; his son, Christ; the wedding feast, the consummation of the Kingdom of God; the invited guests, the Jews; those from the highways, the Gentiles.

3. A new and important feature is the man without a wedding garment. The story assumes that these men gathered in with kindly compulsion had been given an opportunity to wash off the stains of travel and put on festal attire of the king's providing. Had this not been true, the man would not have been speechless for lack of an excuse. The outer darkness is just the dark street outside the lighted banquet chamber (see Matt. 8:12).

4. This incident is introduced into the parable to teach the conditions under which the Gentiles would be admitted into the kingdom. Morally the Jews were better than Gentiles. How, then, men might ask, could the reign of righteousness be promoted by admitting the Gentiles in their uncleanness while the Jews were excluded? Jesus' answer in the parable is that a new and clean nature will be provided them as a gift of grace. Any one who should so little reverence and value God's invitation as to come into His presence to share His blessings lacking that purity of character without which men may not see God, would find his presumption vain.

The teaching of this parable runs close to Paul's doctrine of righteousness (or justification) by God's free grace. There, as here, it is always implied that one so accounted worthy of the Kingdom

of God, must through repentance and faith let God make him worthy.

Seventh Day. *Review.*

1. Review the parables of the lesson and notice how with increasing clearness they forecast the future of the Kingdom of God in relation to Jews and Gentiles and predict the fate of the Jewish nation.

2. "From the day of Jesus, the Jewish people were thus to cherish two ideals of the Kingdom of God—that of the Pharisee and Zealot, and that of the Christian. Each ideal had its future, but so far as we know, Jesus was the one person who foresaw what these futures would be. His lamentations over the cities of Galilee and Jerusalem were prophecies of the inevitable outcome of the rejection of the future He might have given Judea, as certainly as, through His followers, He has made Christian people the arbiters of the world. For the Messianism of Pharisee and Zealot was to bring the Jewish nation to its end" (Mathews, *A History of New Testament Times in Palestine*).

3. What effect must it have on our estimate of the character of Jesus thus to realize how accurately He, alone of His generation, foresaw the outcome of His work and of the Jews' rejection of Him?

Think back over the whole course, to see how the study has (1) changed your conception of Christ and of Christianity, and (2) how much it has increased your obligation to live on a more

Christlike plane ; and to ask whether the desire and the resolve for a true membership in the Kingdom of Christ have kept pace with your increasing light.

“Father, may Thy Kingdom come ;
May Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth.”

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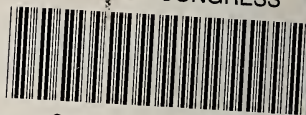
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